The Reptilian People in Authority: Basilicas, Basilisks, and an Allegory

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Learned behaviors and cognitive biases have perpetuated trait inheritance across generations, stemming from an education system established in the fourth century CE, forming a self-sustaining structure resembling a virus causing humans to deny change.

The Semmelweis Reflex is the tendency to reject new evidence because it contradicts established beliefs. Named after Ignaz Semmelweis, who introduced handwashing to reduce infections but was dismissed for challenging medical norms. After being dismissed from his position, he faced opposition and isolation within the medical community, as his handwashing theories were ridiculed and ignored. Eventually, he was committed to a mental asylum, where he reportedly became violent. Soon after his admission, he sustained a severe wound on his hand, potentially from a beating by the staff or another violent encounter, which led to sepsis. This infection caused his death at just 47.

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To address common concerns about accessibility, it is assured that no paywall will be implemented. This research will remain freely accessible, as research should inherently be open to all.

Methodology

The research focuses on investigating motives, behaviors, and observations while deliberately avoiding prior exposure to academic findings utilizing my approach which is **extrapolative trial by error.** This approach minimizes anchoring biases that could influence the thought process. After completing the study, academic material is reviewed comprehensively to evaluate alignment with the findings. Typically, the findings correspond closely with established principles, with exceptions limited to nuanced insights not yet formally recognized but widely observed in society. Few contradictions arise with established norms, apart from the integration of multiple established biases into more complex, composite biases that reflect broader systemic issues.

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Abstract

Reptilian metaphors have long served as powerful critiques of authority throughout European history, symbolizing the cunning, deceit, and oppressive nature of rulers and institutions. This paper examines the evolution of such imagery, beginning with the serpent in the Garden of Eden and progressing through Pliny the Elder's depiction of the basilisk in *Naturalis Historia*. The basilisk, with its lethal venom and deadly gaze, becomes a central symbol representing centralized power and its inherent vulnerabilities. By tracing the transformation of the basilisk within the Holy Roman Empire—where it merges with the imperial eagle—and its later evolution into symbols like the alligator during the Reformation, the study highlights how reptilian imagery has been adapted to reflect shifting societal anxieties and critiques of both imperial and ecclesiastical dominance. The findings reveal that reptilian symbols, from the basilisk to modern "lizard people," consistently represent the tension between power and the populace it governs. When Lizard People or Reptile People symbolize the Heads of Government, they also reflect the religious affiliations of these leaders, suggesting a likely intentional conflation of the two. Although often overlooked in contemporary works, this symbolism echoes through our cultures, most notably exemplified by the Space Pope from *Futurama*.

The Conflation of Lizard People and Humans

The reptilian metaphor has served as a sharp and enduring critique of authority throughout European history, a vivid symbol used to reflect the darker traits of rulers and institutions. The serpent of the Garden of Eden, a symbol of cunning and deceit, established the foundation for this imagery, which was later adopted and expanded in theological and political rhetoric. Saint Augustine's denunciation of heretics as "serpents" and "vipers" echoed Biblical language, emphasizing their corrupting influence and moral failings. During the Investiture Controversy, critics of the Church likened worldly and ambitious clergy to snakes, underscoring their perceived betrayal of spiritual ideals for personal or institutional gain.

Secular rulers were similarly condemned with reptilian imagery. Roman historians such as Tacitus and Suetonius ascribed cunning and treachery to emperors like Nero, framing their reigns as cold-blooded exercises in manipulation and destruction. Later, Enlightenment thinkers employed this language to characterize monarchs as predatory and calculating, contrasting their detachment from human suffering with the warm-blooded vitality of their subjects. Reptilian imagery became a shorthand for the critique of power as distant, unfeeling, and predatory, capturing the unease and mistrust many felt toward centralized authority. Over centuries, this symbolism took root in both religious and political discourse, becoming a persistent reflection of society's anxieties about the dangers of unchecked governance.

While the basilisk's role as an allegory for the Holy Roman Empire is not explicitly documented in singular historical texts, its power lies in the interdisciplinary connections it forges. Mythology, art, religion, and political philosophy converge, forming a web of evidence that validates this allegorical interpretation. Heraldic symbols such as the imperial eagle, prominent within the Holy Roman Empire, and the recurring presence of reptilian imagery among elite families provide a robust framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of imperial symbolism. This synthesis reveals not only the basilisk's metaphorical power but also its enduring significance in shaping perceptions of authority.

At the heart of this allegory lies a transformation that speaks volumes about the intersection of myth, empire, and theology. The basilisk's ancient weakness—the weasel, a humble predator—evolved over centuries into the crowing of a rooster. This shift is no trivial detail; the rooster's crow resonates with deep biblical undertones. In the Gospels, the rooster is inseparably tied to Peter's denial of Jesus, a moment of moral reckoning

that carries profound spiritual weight. That the rooster's cry could also herald the end of the basilisk, the mythical "king of serpents," creates a layered allegory: truth and vigilance triumph over oppressive power, just as denial and betrayal weaken the foundations of authority.

This reinterpretation transforms the basilisk from a mere mythical creature into a commentary on empires. The basilisk's venomous traits—its ability to burn its victims, kill with a glance, spew poison, and leave a trail of destruction—align closely with critiques of imperial and ecclesiastical dominance. The Holy Roman Empire, like the basilisk, wielded immense power, but its authority was also marked by persecution, suppression of dissent, and the lingering harms of its policies.

Pliny's Enigma: A Snake That Does Not Exist

The origins of this allegory deepen when considering Pliny the Elder's account in *Naturalis Historia*. Pliny's basilisk, a serpent no more than a foot long, was said to possess lethal venom, a deadly gaze, and a diadem-like crest—traits that imbued it with an air of regality. Its presence in his writings sits alongside descriptions of real and verifiable creatures, lending an unsettling credibility to its myth. Yet, the basilisk cannot be found anywhere in historical or biological records. Could it be that Pliny's basilisk was never intended to describe a literal creature but rather to embody the traits of the Roman *basilica*?

Pliny's naming of the basilisk seems deliberate, drawing parallels to the *basilica*, the architectural cornerstone of Roman authority. These grand public buildings, places of judgment, governance, and civic organization, were not just physical spaces but symbols of centralized power and control. They harbored many of the traits Pliny attributed to the basilisk: they dictated law, punished dissent, and often left figurative "poison" in the form of systemic oppression or corruption. In this light, the basilisk's characteristics serve as a mythologized reflection of Roman imperial authority.

The Holy Roman Transformation: Snake, Eagle, and Rooster

The Holy Roman Empire took this myth and reshaped it, blending it into its own symbolic framework. Over time, the basilisk merged with the Roman imperial eagle, creating a hybrid creature embodying the empire's dual legacy of divine providence and reptilian cunning. This evolution positioned the basilisk not just as a fearsome beast but as a layered emblem of imperial power.

Curiously, the basilisk's transformation also included the symbolic influence of the rooster—a creature tied to both humility and vigilance. While the original Roman basilisk succumbed to the weasel, the Holy Roman basilisk fell to the rooster's crow. This adaptation amplified the allegory, linking the fall of the basilisk (and by extension, the empire) to biblical themes of denial and redemption. The rooster, a recurring symbol of truth in Christian theology, served as a potent reminder that even the mightiest institutions are vulnerable to moral failures and unyielding truths.

The Burning Question: Why Does the Snake Not Exist?

It is remarkable that, while much of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* has been corroborated over time, the basilisk remains conspicuously absent from reality. Unlike many mythical creatures with roots in distorted accounts of real animals, the basilisk seems to have no physical counterpart. Instead, its characteristics align so closely with the behaviors of empires—particularly the Roman and Holy Roman Empires—that one wonders whether its myth was always intended as an allegory.

The Roman basilica, with its traits of centrality, judgment, and authority, stood as a symbolic precursor to the basilisk's myth. As centuries passed, the basilisk's symbolism grew alongside the rise of Roman Catholic basilicas, where power became increasingly entwined with religious doctrine. The creature evolved, absorbing elements of the Church's authority and the empire's dominance, until it stood as a hybrid of snake, eagle, and rooster—a chimera of imperial and ecclesiastical might.

Pliny the Elder described the basilisk in his *Naturalis Historia* as a small serpent, no more than a foot long, adorned with a crown-like diadem and capable of killing with its gaze or venomous breath. This diminutive size, juxtaposed with its immense power, could be interpreted as a sharp critique—an allegorical diss—of the Roman Empire's sprawling authority, encapsulating its monumental influence within the form of a "little king." The term *basiliskos*, meaning "little king," further ties the creature to the Roman *basilica*.

The basilisk's connection to the Roman Basilica becomes even more compelling when considering the basilica's physical and functional characteristics. These structures, long and almost snake-like in appearance, featured semi-circular sections at their ends called apses. Within these apses, judges would sit on elevated platforms known as daises to oversee legal proceedings, their positions symbolizing authority and judgment.

The apse, with its central figure of power framed by a grand architectural design, evokes the basilisk's diadem, emphasizing the alignment of physical form and symbolic dominance. Whether coincidental, allegorical, or inspired by an actual creature, the basilisk's description mirrors the basilica's capacity to wield immense influence over societal order, blending myth and reality into a potent symbol of authority.

A Reptilian Legacy

This blending of symbols invites deeper reflection. The Holy Roman Empire's deliberate association with the basilisk was no coincidence; it capitalized on the creature's ability to evoke both fear and reverence. Yet, the traits that made the basilisk powerful—its venomous breath, lethal gaze, and diadem-like crest—also underscored its fragility. Its ultimate vulnerability to the rooster's crow revealed a profound allegory: that even the most fearsome institutions could be undone by simple truths, humility, and vigilance.

But the legacy of reptilian symbolism did not end with the basilisk. Over centuries, the convergence of theological power and secular authority reimagined these metaphors. Heads of state who wielded both spiritual and temporal influence came to be likened to various lizards, each association reflecting evolving perceptions of governance and faith. By the time the narrative reached the early modern era, the alligator emerged as a favored emblem in critiques of Catholic authority.

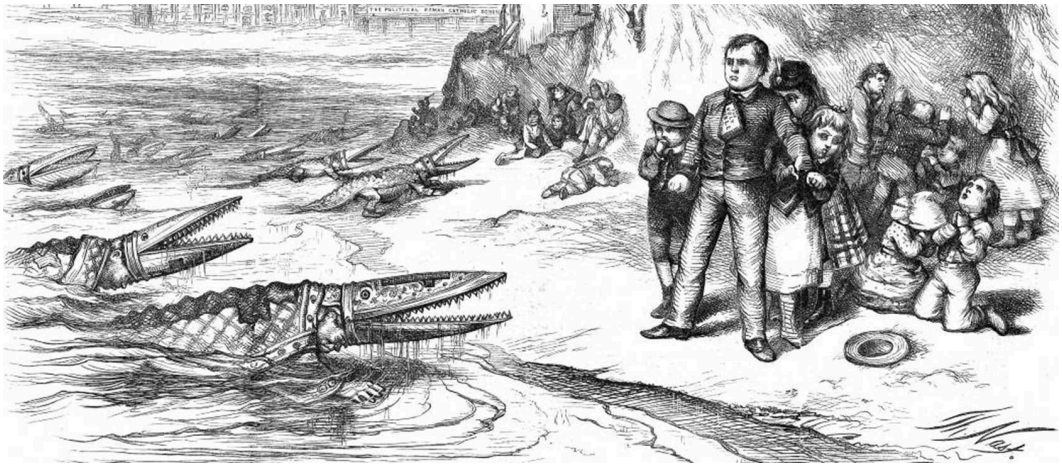
Unlike the basilisk, with its mythological overtones, the alligator's association with swamps and predation took on a more grounded, terrestrial critique. Its cold-blooded demeanor and relentless nature became shorthand for accusations of corruption and avarice within ecclesiastical and royal courts alike.

This shift in reptilian imagery was not arbitrary but rooted in historical continuity. The Church's symbolic use of the basilisk—first inspired by Roman authority and Pliny's writings—provided a foundation upon which new allegories were built. The term basilica, derived from the Greek basilikos ("royal" or "kingly"), had already intertwined imperial power with ecclesiastical architecture, linking the Church's authority to its Roman predecessors. Pliny's basilisk, too, owed its name to the Roman basilica, reinforcing a conceptual bridge between reptilian myth and centralized power.

A thousand years later, these threads converged in subtle but potent ways. As critiques of the Catholic Church intensified during the Reformation, the basilisk's legacy gave way to new reptilian metaphors like the alligator. The shift reflected changing societal concerns, emphasizing the Church's perceived worldliness and predatory behavior. In the Americas, where explorers encountered alligators for the first time, the metaphor took on additional resonance, connecting the Church's colonial ambitions to the swampy, menacing landscapes of the New World.

The evolution from basilisk to alligator was thus a continuation of the same narrative: a critique of authority cloaked in reptilian imagery. Where the basilisk embodied the mystical and imperial dominance of Rome, the alligator reflected a grounded, visceral unease with religious and political institutions. Both creatures, though separated by mythological distance, became emblematic of the persistent tension between power and the people it governed—a tension that transcends time and place.

As this history unfolds, it raises a striking question: Why has reptilian imagery endured as a means of understanding authority, from Pliny's basilisk to modern references to "lizard people"? Perhaps it is the reptile's detachment, its calculated nature, that mirrors the darker aspects of power. Or perhaps it is our own fear of being governed by forces that, like these creatures, operate beyond the warmth of human empathy. Whatever the reason, the story of the basilisk and its successors reveals a profound truth: that humanity's relationship with power has always been as fraught as its fascination with the creatures of myth: most notably the reptiles.



Key Evidence in the Basilisk Narrative

1. **Basilisks Never Being a Real Snake**
    a. Despite detailed descriptions in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* and subsequent writings, no physical or biological evidence of the basilisk has ever been found. Unlike many mythical creatures with origins in exaggerated accounts of real animals, the basilisk appears entirely allegorical.
2. **The Basilisk as a "Little King"**
    a. The basilisk's name derives from the Greek *basiliskos*, meaning "little king." This directly ties the creature to concepts of centralized authority and judgment, aligning with the architectural and symbolic role of the Roman basilica.
3. **Basilicas as "Snake-Like" Structures**
    a. Roman basilicas, with their long, narrow forms and semi-circular apses, bear a visual resemblance to snakes. These architectural features symbolize the basilisk's capacity to dominate its environment, reinforcing the connection between the creature and spaces of judgment and power.
4. **The Basilisk as a Critique of Authority**
    a. Pliny described the basilisk as a small but immensely powerful creature capable of killing with its gaze or venom. This metaphor could critique the Roman Empire's centralized authority, encapsulating its immense influence despite its individual vulnerabilities.
5. **The Weasel and Rooster as Allegorical Weaknesses**
    a. The basilisk's mythical downfall to the humble weasel in ancient lore evolved into a vulnerability to the rooster's crow in Christian allegory. Both animals symbolize traits like persistence, humility, and truth, which stand in stark contrast to the basilisk's cold dominance. This transformation underscores themes of moral reckoning and redemption.
6. **Pliny's Use of Expression and Allegory**
    a. Pliny's emphasis on *exprimo*—to press out ideas—highlights his approach to blending empirical observation with abstract expression. His

description of the basilisk likely serves as a crafted allegory rather than a literal account, drawing on cultural and political contexts to critique authority.

7. **The Basilisk as a Symbol of Imperial Power**

    a. The basilisk's traits of dominion—its crown-like diadem, deadly breath, and gaze—align with characteristics ascribed to imperial rulers. Its ability to "scare away bigger snakes" reflects the consolidation of power, where smaller but centralized forces exert disproportionate influence over larger entities.

8. **Heraldic Symbolism and the Holy Roman Empire**

    a. The Holy Roman Empire incorporated reptilian and avian symbols into its heraldry, blending the basilisk with the imperial eagle. This hybrid imagery reinforced the empire's dual legacy of divine providence and predatory cunning, linking it to the basilisk's mythological roots.

9. **The Basilisk's Transition to the Alligator**

    a. As the basilisk's symbolism faded, new reptilian metaphors emerged. The alligator, with its terrestrial associations and predatory nature, became a favored emblem in critiques of Catholic authority, especially during the Reformation. This shift reflected evolving concerns with corruption and worldliness in ecclesiastical and royal courts.

10. **The Basilica's Role in Reinforcing Authority**

    a. Roman basilicas, as spaces of judgment and governance, were centers of centralized power. Judges seated on raised daises within apses mirrored the basilisk's symbolic gaze, emphasizing their authority to dictate law and enforce societal order.

11. **Biblical and Christian Layers to the Allegory**

    a. The basilisk's eventual vulnerability to the rooster's crow adds a Christian dimension to the myth. The rooster, tied to themes of denial and redemption in the Gospels, amplified the allegory by linking the creature's fall to spiritual and moral truth.

12. **Censorship and the Loss of Explicit Narratives**

a. While explicit connections between the basilisk and authority have been eroded by time and censorship, the allegory persists in reconstructed narratives. Patterns in heraldry, art, and theological rhetoric offer evidence that these fables were integral to critiques of power throughout European history.

13. **Convergence of Roman and Christian Symbolism**

    a. The basilisk's evolution from a Roman critique of centralized power to a Christian allegory reflects the continuity of symbols across cultural and theological contexts. The alignment of Pliny's *basiliskos* with the Roman *basilica*, and later with Catholic authority, underscores the enduring adaptability of this myth.

14. **The "Jesus Lizard" Named After the Basilisk**

    a. The "Jesus Lizard," scientifically named *Basiliscus basiliscus*, is so-called for its ability to run across water—a behavior that evokes the miraculous acts of Christ walking on water. Its naming after the basilisk is strikingly curious, given the mythological creature's reputation for dominion and death. The connection suggests an inversion of the basilisk's attributes: where the mythical basilisk symbolized fear and oppressive power, the Jesus Lizard's grace and defiance of natural limitations offer a symbol of transcendence and faith.

    b. This naming could reflect the enduring cultural imprint of the basilisk, as well as a subtle critique of power structures. By associating a creature with divine symbolism and the ability to "walk above" (literally and metaphorically), it recasts the basilisk's legacy, shifting it from dominance to liberation.

    c. Perhaps these themselves are seeds of implausibility from a time the Church adamantly fought against these images calling them anti-Catholic.

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